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ABSTRACT

This study explores peer assessment and self-efficacy in a counseling practicum. Data was gathered on the perceptions of practicum students, in their second year of a master's program, with regard to the counseling competencies of their peers and themselves. Counselor self-efficacy was measured using the Counselor Self-Efficacy Rating Scale. Results indicate that the average competency rating for all students was in the above minimum competency range, with a mean score of 4.1 out of 5. The average self-efficacy rating for all students was 4.0 out of 5, indicating moderate agreement that they are confident in their counseling abilities and skills. Significant differences by gender were evident in both measures. Females viewed everyone as less competent, and indicated a lower confidence (self-efficacy) in their counseling abilities and skills. It suggests that women have perceptions that a higher level of competency must be demonstrated to reach a particular category of competency and they are less confident than men are in their own skills. Videotaped interviews confirm the gender differences illustrated in the data regarding self-competencies. Peer assessment in counselor education is a necessary and powerful learning technique that counselor educators should consider. (Contains 27 references.) (JDM)

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Students as Evaluators in Practicum:

Examining Peer/Self Assessment and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Research has examined peer assessment in various academic areas including counseling programs. However, peer assessment in counseling practicum has not been examined in recent years and the relationship between peer assessment and self-efficacy has not been explored. The current study is an exploration into peer assessment and self-efficacy in a counseling practicum. In this study, data were gathered on the perceptions of practicum students (second year master's level students) with regard to the counseling competencies of their peers and themselves. In addition, counselor self-efficacy was measured using the Counselor Self-Efficacy Rating Scale. Gender differences were also examined. Results indicated that the average competency rating for all students was in the category of above minimum competency, with a mean score of 4.1 out 5. The average self-efficacy rating for all students was 4.0 out of a possible 5, indicating moderate agreement that they are confident in their counseling abilities and skills. Significant differences by gender were evident in both measures. Specifically, females viewed everyone as less competent than did males and females indicated a lower confidence (self-efficacy) in their counseling abilities and skills. Implications of the results are discussed and suggestions for future research are made.

Introduction

Peer assessment has been explored in several areas in higher education programs (Bould, 1990, Brown & Knight, 1994, Topping, 1998) and in counseling education programs, although not in recent years (Friesen, D., & Dunning, G.B., 1973; Seligman, L., 1978; Wagner, C., & Smith, J.P. 1979). Peer assessment has been described as a successful way in which students can improve their own learning, target their own strengths and weaknesses and develop skills that are transferable professionally (Brown & Knight). Benefits can occur for both the assessor and the assessed. Specifically, assessors learn by teaching (Topping) and also engage in increased metacognitive activities such as reviewing, summarizing, clarifying and considering deviations from the ideal (Van Lehn, Chi, Baggett, and Murray, 1995). For the assessed, Topping suggests that greater clarity about what can be defined as high quality professional work is more likely to occur resulting in greater attention to detail in performance.

Aside from its application in higher education generally, peer assessment in the development of professional skills has been utilized in a variety of settings including medicine (Orr, 1995; Ramsey, 1996), teaching (Franklin, 1981; Lasater, 1994), and counseling (Friesen, D., & Dunning, G.B., 1973; Seligman, L., 1978; Wagner, C., & Smith, J.P. 1979). Specifically in counseling, peer assessment has been used in assertiveness training (Teekell, 1989), and more recently in a model for counselor education faculty (Osborne, W., & Purkey, W.,1995). However, it has not been recently applied in school counseling programs including application in the practicum experience; yet, it is particularly

applicable to any program that needs to develop activist counselors, for example, in urban school counselor settings.

Urban school counseling programs train counselors who serve, among others, students from low income, minority and immigrant, single parent households and families on welfare. These counselors must try to significantly impact the quality of the educational experiences of these poor students. In the professional development of these counselors, it is important to provide emphasis on promoting counselors who are more active advocates for the optimal cognitive and affective development of students, more activist leaders pervasively, and more active in their own and their colleagues' professional development. In order to engage professionally in these kinds of activities, counselors-in-training need to become more active in their own development including their ability to assess their own and their colleagues' skills. One approach to developing these skills is peer assessment.

Based on this decision, the structure of a Practicum Course in a Masters' Program in School Counseling was modified. Greater emphasis was placed on a collaborative approach in the counseling practicum to empower counselors-in-training to become more active in their own and their colleagues' professional development through peer and self-assessment.

The Current Study

The current study focused on the implementation of a model of peer and self-assessment in an urban school counseling practicum that emphasized activist counseling and the development of knowledge in cognitive and affective development of urban children. Students critiqued themselves regularly in individual supervision, and evaluated each other and themselves on counselor competencies. These competencies included not only regular counselor areas of competency but also knowledge and application of normal developmental theory to counseling cases. Informal evaluation using the scales described below went on throughout the course. Students submitted final scores at the middle of the

semester and at end of the practicum for themselves and their peers. Students also took a Counselor Self-Efficacy measure at the end of the practicum.

The Counselor Competency Rating Scales[CCRS], were adapted from counseling practicum competencies typically used in Counselor Education Master's Programs. Competencies examined included the following:

1. ability to establish and maintain a relationship
2. ability to master a variety of counseling techniques
3. ability to facilitate client's awareness of needs (including developmental)
4. ability to engage in assessment (including knowledge of developmental considerations)
5. ability to present cases and incorporate developmental assumptions in conceptualization when appropriate
6. ability to terminate or refer
7. ability to integrate theory and practice (including development when appropriate) in helping clients
8. ability to identify professional role and function for self and other colleagues (including development when appropriate)
9. ability to include issues of ethics in counseling when relevant

The instrument used a 5-point response scale corresponding to Likert-type scale responses indicating degree of agreement regarding respondents' assessment of the quality of their own and their peers' counseling abilities (1= not adequate; 2 = below minimum; 3 = minimally adequate; 4 = above minimum; 5 = superior).

The Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES), designed by Melchert, T.P., Hays, V.L., Wiljanen, L.M., and Kolocek, A.K. (1996), included 20 items related to level of self-efficacy in the practice of individual and group counseling and therapy. The development of this measure was based on a review of the literature regarding knowledge and skill competencies needed by counselors (e.g., Borders & Leddick, 1987; Boylan, Malley, & Scott, 1988). The instrument used a 5-point response scale corresponding to Likert-type scale

responses indicating degree of agreement regarding respondents' confidence in their counseling abilities (agree strongly, agree moderately, neutral uncertain, disagree moderately, disagree strongly). For example, respondents were asked to respond to statements such as: my knowledge of personality development is adequate for counseling effectively, and my knowledge of ethical issues related to counseling is adequate for me to perform professionally.

Subjects were 30 graduate students (originally 33 students) who were students in Practicum courses in a Masters' degree program. The Practicum course was the final course before students would finish the program and become provisionally certified as school counselors. Thirteen men and seventeen women participated in the study.

Results

The means and standard deviations for both measures are reported in Table I below.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviation for Competency and Self Efficacy

Group	Mean Competency Rating	S.D.	Mean Self-Efficacy Rating	S.D.
All	4.1	.42	4.0	.41
Females	3.8*	.43	3.7**	.43
Males	4.3*	.45	4.3**	.40

Significant @ p.< .05; ** Significant @ p < .01

The mean for all students on the Counseling Competency Rating Scale was 4.1 (s.d. = .42). This result indicates that these students assessed themselves and their peers at an "above minimum" level in counseling competencies. The scores of women and men, however, were significantly different, t (28) =

2.78, $p < .05$). Women gave everyone lower ratings ($\underline{M}$ =3.8, s.d. = .42) than did men ($\underline{M}$ = 4.3, s.d. = .45), suggesting that women view themselves and their peers as less competent in counseling abilities and techniques at this stage in their development.

With regard to self-efficacy, the mean score for all students on the Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale [CSES] was 4.0. This score suggests that these students, for the most part, appear to be moderately confident about their counseling abilities and skills. The scores of women and men, however, were significantly different, $t(28) = 3.27$, $p < .01$). Women were less confident ($\underline{M}$ =3.7, s.d. = .43) than were men ($\underline{M}$ = 4.3, s.d. = .40) in their counseling abilities and techniques at this stage in their development.

Discussion

These students appear to have realistic evaluations of their competencies at the end of a two-year program. They clearly believe they are more than minimally competent, yet do not consider themselves superior. One of the modifications in this work will be to revise the categorization of the competency scale, since the classification "superior" is too far removed from above the minimum. A scale reflecting a broader range of competencies would provide a better opportunity for more precise evaluation. Several students commented on this aspect of the measure.

The mean on the self-efficacy measure is within the range of the mean found by Melchert (1996). This finding suggests that for these students self-efficacy ratings did not differ from other counselors-in-training. In light of the referral to and use of competency scales throughout the course, it suggests further that these counseling students were not negatively affected in their views of self-efficacy. Future analyses on this data will examine the relationship between self-efficacy and self – competency evaluations since this study included self and peer assessment in one score.

The results found on gender differences were most interesting. This was a very small sample and these results must, therefore, be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, it seems that these women have perceptions that a higher level of competency must be demonstrated to reach a particular category of competency than do men. In addition, in looking at the two indicators, women not only seem to think everyone is not as competent as men think they are, but also the women are less confident than are the men in their own skills. Self-efficacy deals primarily with cognitively perceived capability of the self (Bandura, 1977) and has been shown to emerge as a relatively one-dimensional construct that embodies one's perceptions of competence in a given domain (Bong & Clark, 1999). Bandura (1997) has suggested that when one lacks relevant prior experience with the task at hand, efficacy appraisals become more sensitive to comparative information. This has been shown to be particularly true when standards for success are ambiguous (France-Kaatrude & Smith, 1985; Marsh, Walker, & Dubus, 1991). It may be that the self-confidence of the women, while lower than the men, is more influenced by lack of prior experience and by the ambiguousness of the tasks being evaluated in the practicum. Future research needs to examine this possibility as well as other explanations of these differences. In addition, an examination of these two constructs in relation to GPA might enable yet another explanation regarding these gender differences on both measures.

Finally, videotaped interviews confirmed the gender differences illustrated in the data regarding self-competencies. In those interviews, students were asked whether they thought that men and women would rate the same. An initial qualitative assessment of those interviews indicated that women believe in a much higher level of competency to be graded "above minimum" level. More formal analysis of these interviews will be done.

Peer assessment in counselor education is a necessary and powerful learning technique that counselor educators should consider. Students not only gain the perspective of others in their

development, besides their Professors' evaluations, but also more importantly, become empowered to engage in active appraisal as developing professionals, of themselves and of their professional colleagues.

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